SHAYKH AL-ISLAM

IBN TAYMIYYAH

661–728 AH | 1263–1328 CE

A Complete Scholarly Biography

Compiled from Classical Sunni Sources

1. *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah — Ibn Kathir*
2. *Al-Durar al-Kaminah — Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani*
3. *Al-Uqud al-Durriyyah — Ibn Abd al-Hadi*
4. *Siyar Alam al-Nubala — Al-Dhahabi*
5. *Dhayl Tabaqat al-Hanabilah — Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali*

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Preface

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, Lord of all the worlds, and may peace and blessings be upon the seal of the prophets, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah, his family, his companions, and all those who follow his guidance until the Day of Resurrection.

This biography presents the life, scholarship, trials, and enduring legacy of Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (661–728 AH / 1263–1328 CE), one of the most formidable and influential Islamic scholars in the history of the Muslim world. Known by his honorary title Shaykh al-Islam — a designation attesting to his unparalleled command of the Islamic sciences — Ibn Taymiyyah was a Hanbali jurist, Qur'anic exegete, hadith scholar, theologian, and a fearless voice for orthodoxy at a time of profound crisis.

This account draws primarily upon the classical biographical works of his contemporaries and students: Ibn Kathir's Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, Al-Dhahabi's Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', Ibn Abd al-Hadi's Al-'Uqud al-Durriyyah, and Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's Al-Durar al-Kaminah, supplemented by Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali's Dhayl Tabaqat al-Hanabilah. These sources, composed by individuals who either knew Ibn Taymiyyah personally or studied under his students, provide an unparalleled window into the man, his times, and his thought.

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1. Historical Background: The World Ibn Taymiyyah Inherited

1.1 The Political Landscape of the 7th–8th Century Hijri

The 7th and 8th centuries of the Islamic calendar — corresponding roughly to the 13th and 14th centuries CE — stand among the most turbulent and consequential eras in Islamic history. The classical Abbasid Caliphate, which had endured for five centuries as the symbolic and often practical center of Sunni political authority, was extinguished in 656 AH (1258 CE) when the Mongol armies of Hulagu Khan sacked Baghdad and executed Caliph Al-Musta'sim. The execution of the Caliph marked not merely a political rupture but a civilizational earthquake, shattering the notion of a unified Muslim state governed by a successor to the Prophet (peace be upon him).

In the years following, the Muslim world fragmented into competing sultanates, principalities, and dynasties. Egypt and the Levant (Bilad al-Sham) fell under the rule of

the Mamluk Sultanate, founded by former slave-soldiers who had defeated the Crusaders at the Battle of 'Ain Jalut in 658 AH (1260 CE) and repelled successive Mongol incursions. The Mamluks, centered in Cairo, projected an image of Islamic authority and orthodoxy while frequently being embroiled in court intrigues, power struggles, and political violence. It was in this complex, often dangerous environment that Ibn Taymiyyah lived and moved as a scholar, advisor, and activist.

The Mongol Ilkhanate continued to pose an existential threat to the Muslim Levant throughout Ibn Taymiyyah's lifetime. Though the Ilkhans nominally converted to Islam under Ghazan Khan in 694 AH (1295 CE), their practice of Islam was, in Ibn Taymiyyah's considered legal opinion, insufficient to exempt them from being resisted by force — a position that placed him at the forefront of mobilizing Muslim resistance and that earned him both devoted followers and powerful enemies.

1.2 The Intellectual Climate

The intellectual landscape of the period was no less contested. The rationalist theology of the Ash'ari and Maturidi schools dominated the official religious institutions of the Mamluk and other sultanates. While these schools had done valuable work in defending Islam against Greek philosophical attacks, Ibn Taymiyyah believed they had themselves been corrupted by the methodology of Greek kalam (speculative theology), compromising the pure creed of the Salaf — the first three generations of Muslims whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) described as the best of generations.

Simultaneously, various strands of Sufism had grown enormously influential in popular religious life. While Ibn Taymiyyah respected and indeed endorsed the ascetic and spiritual dimensions of early Sufism, he vigorously opposed what he considered innovations (bid'ah) and deviant beliefs that had crept into later Sufi practice — particularly the doctrines of wahdat al-wujud (unity of existence) associated with Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638 AH), the veneration of saints to a degree that, in his view, approached shirk (associating partners with Allah), and the ecstatic practices of certain tariqa orders.

The Shi'a political and theological challenge also occupied his attention. With the fall of the Sunni Caliphate, various Shi'a groups had grown in influence, and polemical exchanges between Sunni and Shi'a scholars intensified. Ibn Taymiyyah's Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah, a vast refutation of the Shi'a scholar Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli, stands as his most comprehensive engagement with this challenge.

1.3 The Role of the Hanbali School

The Hanbali school of jurisprudence, founded by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164–241 AH), had always been distinguished by its strict adherence to transmitted texts — the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the opinions of the Companions — over the speculative methods of kalam. Imam Ahmad's famous trial (mihna) at the hands of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun, who attempted to coerce scholars into affirming the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an, had established the Hanbali school as the custodian of Sunni orthodoxy against rationalist innovations. By the time of Ibn Taymiyyah, the Hanbalis were a minority within the scholarly establishment but exercised disproportionate moral authority in Damascus and among the broader Muslim populace.

It was within this school, and in the city of Damascus, that Ibn Taymiyyah grew up, was educated, and eventually taught — carrying forward the Hanbali tradition with an intellectual ferocity and independence that would redefine the very meaning of Salafi scholarship.

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2. Birth and Lineage

2.1 Full Name and Title

His full name is Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim ibn 'Abd al-Salam ibn 'Abdallah ibn Abi al-Qasim al-Khidr ibn Muhammad ibn al-Khidr ibn 'Ali ibn 'Abdallah ibn Taymiyyah al-Harrani al-Dimashqi al-Hanbali. He is most commonly known as Taqi al-Din Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah. The honorific Taqi al-Din means "Piety of the Religion," and he came to be known universally by the title Shaykh al-Islam — a title bestowed by contemporaries and affirmed by generations of scholars thereafter. Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH) writes in Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah: "He is the Imam, the learned scholar, the hafiz, the critic, the jurist, the mujtahid, the mufassir, the shaykh of Islam, the rare phenomenon of his era."

> "*He is the Imam, the learned scholar, the hafiz, the critic, the jurist, the mujtahid, the mufassir, the unique individual of his time... Shaykh al-Islam, the like of whom none has been seen in his time, nor in the times before him for many generations.*"
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> **— Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, Vol. 14**

2.2 Date and Place of Birth

Ibn Taymiyyah was born on Monday, the 10th of Rabi' al-Awwal, 661 AH, corresponding to January 22, 1263 CE, in the city of Harran. Harran was an ancient city located in present-day southeastern Turkey, near the Syrian border, historically significant as the home of the patriarch Ibrahim (Abraham) before his migration, and a center of learning in the early Islamic centuries. At the time of Ibn Taymiyyah's birth, it lay in a region increasingly threatened by Mongol military campaigns.

2.3 Family Background

Ibn Taymiyyah was born into a distinguished family of scholars that had produced generations of jurists, scholars, and educators. His grandfather, Majd al-Din Abu al-Barakat 'Abd al-Salam ibn Taymiyyah (d. 652 AH), was a celebrated Hanbali scholar and the author of Al-Muharrar, an authoritative Hanbali jurisprudential text. His father, Shihab al-Din 'Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyyah (d. 682 AH), was also a recognized Hanbali scholar who served as the head of the Dar al-Hadith al-Sukkariyya in Damascus. His paternal uncle, Fakhr al-Din was likewise a scholar of note. Scholarship was thus not merely a vocation but a familial identity.

Al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH), Ibn Taymiyyah's devoted student and biographer, notes in Siyar A'lam al-Nubala' that the family's scholarly lineage stretched back generations, placing Ibn Taymiyyah within a continuous chain of Islamic learning that commanded enormous respect in Damascus and beyond.

2.4 Migration to Damascus

When Ibn Taymiyyah was approximately six or seven years old (around 667 AH / 1268–69 CE), the Mongol threat to Harran compelled his family to flee. The Mongols had been ravaging northern Syria and the Jazira region, and the fear of destruction was palpable. His father, 'Abd al-Halim, gathered the family's books — reportedly loaded onto several carts — and led the migration westward to Damascus, which was then under Mamluk rule and relatively secure. This migration would prove fateful: Damascus became the stage upon which Ibn Taymiyyah would spend most of his life, and its mosques, madrasas, and streets the battleground for his intellectual and religious struggles.

> "*His father migrated with the family from Harran to Damascus out of fear of the Tatars, and they came bearing their books. Ahmad was among them as a young boy, and he memorized the Qur'an and studied hadith and jurisprudence as a youth.*"

— Al-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', Vol. 18

3. Early Education

3.1 The Damascus Scholarly Environment

Damascus in the late 7th century AH was a thriving center of Islamic learning. It hosted numerous madrasas, Dar al-Hadith institutions, and scholarly circles that attracted students and scholars from across the Muslim world. The Umayyad Mosque stood at the heart of the city as a venue for public lessons and scholarly debates. It was in this environment that the young Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah received one of the most rigorous educations possible in the medieval Islamic world.

3.2 Memorization of the Qur'an and Hadith

Ibn Taymiyyah memorized the Qur'an in its entirety at an early age, as was customary for children of scholarly families. He then threw himself into the study of hadith with a passion that astonished his contemporaries. He studied under numerous hadith masters and accumulated a command of the hadith literature — including knowledge of individual narrators, chains of transmission (isnad), and the subtleties of hadith critique — that was essentially unrivalled among his contemporaries. Al-Dhahabi, himself a master of the hadith sciences, wrote of him: "As for the knowledge of hadith, he is the imam of that field."

Ibn Abd al-Hadi reports in Al-'Uqud al-Durriyyah that Ibn Taymiyyah's retention was so extraordinary that he could recall verbatim a text after reading it once or twice, and that he would memorize a book before presenting it to his teacher for instruction. He is said to have memorized the Musnad of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, one of the largest hadith compilations, along with the Six Books (Al-Kutub al-Sittah) and numerous other hadith collections.

3.3 His Teachers

The range and eminence of his teachers reflects the seriousness with which his family approached his education. Among his most important teachers were:

Shihab al-Din 'Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyyah — His own father, from whom he learned jurisprudence, hadith, and the fundamentals of Islamic sciences. His father served as a model of scholarly integrity and devotion.

Zayn al-Din Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Da'im al-Maqdisi (d. 668 AH) — One of the leading hadith scholars of Damascus, from whom the young Ibn Taymiyyah received his earliest formal hadith licenses (ijazat).

Majd al-Din Ibn 'Askar al-Dimashqi — A respected scholar from whom he learned fiqh and foundational texts.

Yahya ibn al-Sairafi — A specialist in Arabic linguistics and grammar.

Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Kafi al-Maqdisi — A leading Hanbali jurist of the time.

Al-Qasim al-Irbili — A recognized authority in jurisprudence and Qur'anic sciences.

Ibn Abd al-Hadi reports that Ibn Taymiyyah studied under more than two hundred scholars by the time he reached maturity. Ibn Kathir observes that he "listened to much hadith and occupied himself with the sciences of hadith and its people, men and meanings."

3.4 Mastery of the Arabic Sciences

Alongside Qur'an and hadith, Ibn Taymiyyah undertook intensive study of Arabic grammar, rhetoric, and literature — the foundational tools for understanding and interpreting the sacred texts. He studied under leading grammarians of his time and developed an approach to the Arabic language that was deeply rooted in the usage of the early Arabs and the classical literary tradition. This linguistic mastery would later prove decisive in his theological debates, where he consistently appealed to authentic Arabic usage against those who, in his view, distorted Qur'anic meanings through philosophical interpretation.

3.5 Early Signs of Genius

Contemporary biographers record numerous anecdotes attesting to the precocious genius of the young Ibn Taymiyyah. Ibn Abd al-Hadi relates that scholars who tested him in his youth found his knowledge already surpassing that of men decades older. A frequently cited account describes how the great hadith scholar Ibn Daqiq al-'Id met Ibn Taymiyyah as a young man and was astonished to discover that he had already mastered the subtleties of hadith criticism and Islamic jurisprudence to a degree that Ibn Daqiq al-'Id himself found impressive.

> "*I saw a man who had all the sciences before his eyes, taking from them what he wished and leaving what he wished.*"

— Ibn Daqiq al-'Id, quoted in Al-'Uqud al-Durriyyah by Ibn Abd al-Hadi

4. Scholarly Development

4.1 Mastery of the Hanbali Madhhab

Ibn Taymiyyah began formally teaching when he was approximately twenty years old, following the death of his father in 682 AH. He assumed his father's position at the Dar al-Hadith al-Sukkariyya in Damascus and quickly established himself as the leading Hanbali authority of his generation. His mastery of the Hanbali madhhab was total and encyclopedic: he could recite from memory the positions of Imam Ahmad on virtually any question of fiqh, along with the textual evidence upon which those positions rested.

However, Ibn Taymiyyah's relationship to the Hanbali school was not that of a passive transmitter. He engaged with the tradition critically, distinguishing between the binding authority of the Qur'an and Sunnah and the fallible, albeit valuable, opinions of the madhhab's jurists. He insisted that where a clear textual proof existed, no mujtahid's opinion could override it — including Imam Ahmad's own opinions where they appeared to contradict clearer evidence. This stance made him a controversial figure even within the Hanbali school, but it also elevated him to the status of a genuine mujtahid mutlaq (independent interpreter) in the eyes of his admirers.

4.2 Independent Ijtihad

Ibn Taymiyyah's claim to independent ijtihad was validated by virtually every objective observer who examined his work. His Fatawa and jurisprudential writings reveal a mind that had mastered not only the Hanbali tradition but the positions and reasoning of all four Sunni madhhabs — Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali — as well as the positions of earlier scholars predating the formal madhhabs. He consistently cited the positions of the Companions, the Tabi'un (Successors), and the early imams on any given question.

Among his notable independent legal opinions: he held that the divorce formula uttered three times in a single sitting constitutes only one revocable divorce (not three irrevocable ones), a position that had been the minority view but which he argued was better supported by the textual evidence. This ruling, which he issued based on careful examination of hadith and the practice of the early Muslims, brought him into serious

conflict with the established legal authorities of his time and contributed to one of his imprisonments.

4.3 Teaching Circles in Damascus

Ibn Taymiyyah's teaching circles in Damascus drew students from across the Muslim world. He taught at the Umayyad Mosque and at the Sukkariyya Dar al-Hadith, covering the full range of Islamic sciences: Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), hadith, jurisprudence (fiqh), theology (aqeedah), the principles of jurisprudence (usul al-fiqh), and Arabic language. His lessons were reportedly attended by hundreds of students who sat in awe of his erudition, his clarity of exposition, and his capacity to field complex questions without hesitation.

Ibn Kathir, who studied under Ibn Taymiyyah and who is among the most reliable witnesses to his teacher's methods, describes how Ibn Taymiyyah would dictate fatawa (legal opinions) with extraordinary speed and comprehensiveness, and that his responses to complex questions demonstrated a command of Islamic scholarship that left contemporaries speechless.

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5. His Methodology in Aqeedah

5.1 The Principle of Salafi Theology

The cornerstone of Ibn Taymiyyah's theological method was his insistence on returning to the creed of the Salaf al-Salih — the pious predecessors comprising the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), the Tabi'un (Successors), and the Taba' al-Tabi'in (the generation following the Successors). He held that the creed of this first community, preserved in the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah, represented the purest and most complete expression of Islamic theology, and that all subsequent theological elaboration should be measured against it.

His methodology can be summarized in the principle he expresses repeatedly in his theological treatises: the obligation to affirm what Allah affirms of Himself and His attributes, without tashbih (likening Allah to creation), ta'til (negating the attributes altogether), takyif (asking how the attributes are), or tamthil (drawing an analogy between Allah's attributes and those of creatures). This four-way rejection defines the Salafi theological method as Ibn Taymiyyah understood and articulated it.

5.2 The Names and Attributes of Allah

The most famous and consequential aspect of Ibn Taymiyyah's aqeedah was his defense of the divine Names and Attributes (Asma' wa Sifat). Against the Mu'tazilites who denied the reality of divine attributes in the name of absolute divine unity, and against the Ash'ari method that acknowledged divine attributes but interpreted them in ways that Ibn Taymiyyah found philosophically motivated rather than textually grounded, he defended the approach of the Salaf: to affirm all the Names and Attributes that Allah affirms in the Qur'an and that are confirmed in authentic hadith, affirming their reality while denying any resemblance to creaturely attributes.

This approach was encapsulated in his famous principle derived from the Qur'an: Allah says, 'There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing' (Qur'an 42:11). The first part of the verse — 'Nothing is like unto Him' — negates resemblance; the second part — 'He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing' — affirms real attributes. The conjunction of negation and affirmation defines the Salafi method.

> *"The way of the Salaf is to affirm what Allah has affirmed for Himself and to negate from Him what He has negated from Himself, without tahrif, ta'til, takyif, or tamthil."*
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> **— Ibn Taymiyyah, Al-Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah**

5.3 Refutation of Philosophical Theology (Kalam)

Ibn Taymiyyah's most intellectually ambitious theological project was his comprehensive critique of the methodology of kalam — Greek-influenced rational theology — as applied to Islamic belief. In his monumental Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa al-Naql ("Repelling the Contradiction of Reason and Revelation"), he argued in ten volumes that the apparent contradictions between reason and revelation posited by the mutakallimun (speculative theologians) were illusory, arising from flawed philosophical premises rather than from genuine contradictions within authentic Islamic sources.

He engaged directly with Aristotelian metaphysics, demonstrating extensive familiarity with the Greek philosophical tradition as well as with the Islamic philosophers — al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) — who had developed sophisticated syntheses of Greek and Islamic thought. His critique was not anti-rational but methodological: he argued that the syllogistic logic and the specific premises of Aristotelian philosophy were not self-evidently true and could not be granted authority over the explicit statements of revelation.

5.4 Major Theological Works

Al-Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah (The Creed of Wasit)

Composed in a single sitting in 698 AH in response to a request from a judge from Wasit, Iraq, this concise treatise became perhaps the most widely studied creedal text in Sunni Islam. It presents the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah with clarity and systematic organization, covering the six pillars of faith, the divine Names and Attributes, the articles of Sunni creed regarding the Companions, and the eschatological realities. Its balanced, text-grounded approach made it a touchstone for subsequent Sunni theology.

Al-Hamawiyyah (The Treatise of Hama)

Written in response to a question posed by a scholar from Hama concerning the divine Attributes — specifically whether it was permissible to affirm that Allah 'descends' to the lowest heaven as stated in the hadith — this treatise provides an extensive defense of the Salafi approach to divine attributes, refuting Ash'ari ta'wil (allegorical interpretation) and defending literal affirmation without tashbih.

Al-Tadmuriyyah

Named after the city of Tadmur (Palmyra) near which it was composed, this treatise presents an even more comprehensive treatment of the Names and Attributes and is considered by many scholars to be Ibn Taymiyyah's most philosophically mature work on theology. It addresses the epistemological foundations of Sunni theology and provides detailed responses to the philosophical objections raised against affirming divine attributes.

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6. His Major Scholarly Works

The breadth and depth of Ibn Taymiyyah's scholarly output is staggering. Writing under conditions of constant controversy, trial, and imprisonment, he produced works in virtually every field of Islamic scholarship. The collected edition of his fatawa and treatises — Majmu' al-Fatawa — runs to thirty-seven volumes in the standard printed edition. The following are among his most significant contributions:

6.1 Majmu' al-Fatawa

This thirty-seven volume collection, compiled by his student Ibn Qasim, gathers Ibn Taymiyyah's legal opinions (fatawa), theological treatises, and scholarly responses on virtually every topic in the Islamic sciences. It is the single most comprehensive repository of his thought and remains an essential reference for Islamic scholarship to this day. The collection covers topics ranging from the minutiae of ritual purification to the great metaphysical questions of divine being, from marriage and divorce law to the permissibility of jihad against apostate rulers.

6.2 Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa al-Naql

This ten-volume masterpiece is arguably Ibn Taymiyyah's most intellectually formidable work. The title translates as 'Repelling the Supposed Contradiction between Reason and Revelation.' His central thesis, developed across thousands of pages with extraordinary philosophical sophistication, is that the supposed contradiction between rational demonstration and textual revelation — which the Ash'ari and rationalist theologians used to justify interpreting (ta'wil) away the apparent meaning of Qur'anic texts — is entirely illusory. True reason, properly employed with correct premises, never contradicts authentic revelation. When apparent contradiction arises, it is because of faulty rational premises, not because of the text itself.

6.3 Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah

This massive work — published in eight volumes in modern editions — constitutes Ibn Taymiyyah's comprehensive refutation of Minhaj al-Karama, a Shi'a polemical treatise by the scholar Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli (d. 726 AH). Ibn Taymiyyah engages exhaustively with Shi'a historical, theological, and jurisprudential claims, providing detailed counter-arguments from the Qur'an, hadith, and early Islamic history. The work remains the most extensive Sunni scholarly response to Shi'a theological and historical arguments ever written.

6.4 Iqtida' al-Sirat al-Mustaqim

This important work addresses the Islamic obligation to distinguish Muslim religious practice from that of non-Muslims, particularly Jews and Christians, and the dangers of religious syncretism and the adoption of non-Islamic religious customs. Ibn Taymiyyah develops his argument on the basis of Qur'anic injunctions, prophetic hadith, and the practice of the early Muslims, arguing that the distinctive character of Islamic worship

is theologically essential and cannot be compromised without undermining monotheism itself. The work has been particularly influential in discussions of religious boundaries and identity.

6.5 Al-Sarim al-Maslul 'ala Shatim al-Rasul

Translated as 'The Drawn Sword Against the One Who Insults the Messenger,' this work was composed in response to a case in which a Christian man was accused of insulting the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Ibn Taymiyyah argues from Qur'anic evidence, hadith, and the consensus of the early scholars that insulting the Prophet is a capital offense regardless of the perpetrator's religion, and that this ruling represents the considered judgment of Islamic jurisprudence. The work demonstrates his characteristic method of exhaustive textual research in support of a single legal position.

6.6 Kitab al-Iman

This significant work on the theology of faith (iman) provides Ibn Taymiyyah's detailed account of the nature of faith, its components (affirmation, verbal acknowledgment, and action), its increase and decrease, and its relationship to Islam and ihsan. He engages with the long-running debates between the Murji'a, the Khawarij, and Ahl al-Sunnah on the definition of faith, arguing for the Salafi position that actions are constitutive of faith and not merely a supplement to it.

6.7 Tafsir and Qur'anic Sciences

Ibn Taymiyyah's contributions to Qur'anic exegesis are represented in his Muqaddima fi Usul al-Tafsir (Introduction to the Principles of Qur'anic Interpretation) and in scattered portions of his fatawa. The Muqaddima is considered a foundational text in the methodology of tafsir, providing a comprehensive account of the correct approach to Qur'anic interpretation: beginning with the Qur'an's own internal explication, then the Sunnah, then the reports of the Companions and Successors, and only then legitimate linguistic and contextual analysis.

7. His Debates and Refutations

7.1 Against the Philosophers

Ibn Taymiyyah's engagement with Greek-influenced Islamic philosophy was comprehensive and relentless. His Al-Radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyin ("Refutation of the Logicians"), composed during his imprisonment in Alexandria, challenges the foundational claim of the Islamic Aristotelians that Greek syllogistic logic constitutes the necessary and universal method of valid reasoning. He argues that the syllogism is neither the only valid form of inference nor capable of producing genuine certainty about metaphysical questions, and that the Islamic sciences possess their own epistemological foundations — rooted in revelation, human nature (fitra), and inductive generalization from experiential knowledge — that are epistemically superior for the purposes of theology.

His confrontation with the legacy of Ibn Sina was particularly intense. He argued that Ibn Sina's reconstruction of Islamic theology on Aristotelian foundations had produced a view of God — as the Necessary Existent (Wajib al-Wujud) whose essence is identical with existence — that was philosophically incoherent and theologically incompatible with the personal God of the Qur'an who speaks, commands, and acts in history.

7.2 Against Ash'ari Theology

Ibn Taymiyyah's debates with Ash'ari theologians were perhaps his most politically consequential, since the Ash'ari school dominated the official scholarly establishment of the Mamluk Sultanate. His fundamental objection to the Ash'ari method was not a rejection of its defenders' sincerity but a methodological critique: by accepting the Greek philosophical framework of the mutakallimun, the Ash'aris had, in his view, accepted a set of philosophical premises that inevitably led them to interpret (ta'wil) the apparent meanings of Qur'anic texts in ways that violated the language of the Arabs and contradicted the understanding of the Companions.

The debate over the divine Attributes — particularly the attributes involving Allah's actions described in the Qur'an, such as His "descending" to the lowest heaven, His "settling" upon the Throne (istawa), and His "coming" on the Day of Judgment — crystallized the disagreement. The Ash'aris typically interpreted such expressions allegorically; Ibn Taymiyyah insisted that affirming them literally, while negating any resemblance to created things, was the authentic Salafi approach.

7.3 Against Shi'a Scholars

Ibn Taymiyyah's refutation of Shi'a theology in Minhaj al-Sunnah is the most comprehensive Sunni scholarly engagement with Shi'a thought ever written. He addresses the Shi'a doctrine of the Imamate — the belief that political and religious authority after the Prophet was divinely designated to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) and his descendants — with extensive analysis of the historical and textual evidence, arguing that the Shi'a case rests on fabricated traditions and misreadings of authentic ones. He defends the Companions, particularly Abu Bakr and 'Umar, against Shi'a critiques, and provides a sustained defense of the traditional Sunni historical narrative.

7.4 Against Sufi Extremism

Ibn Taymiyyah's relationship to Sufism was nuanced. He respected the early Sufi masters — al-Junaid, al-Hallaj within limits, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, whom he greatly admired — and himself wore the Qadiri cloak (khirqa) in acknowledgment of the spiritual tradition it represented. However, he mounted sustained critiques against three specific positions within later Sufism:

First, the doctrine of wahdat al-wujud (unity of existence) associated with Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638 AH) and his school, which he read as a form of pantheism incompatible with Islamic monotheism. Second, the practice of seeking intercession through the saints (tawassul bi al-awliya') by addressing the dead or visiting graves with supplicatory prayers — which he held to be a form of prohibited innovation bordering on shirk. Third, the use of sama' (spiritual music and ecstatic gatherings) as a method of worship, which he considered an unauthorized innovation.

His polemical treatises against these practices — particularly his discussions within Majmu' al-Fatawa and his dedicated treatise on visiting graves — were enormously influential and remain central reference points in ongoing debates about the boundaries of orthodox Sufi practice.

8. His Role in Jihad Against the Mongols

8.1 The Mongol Threat

The most dramatically courageous episodes of Ibn Taymiyyah's public life occurred in the context of Mongol military threats to the Levant. Though the Mongol Ilkhan Ghazan had converted to Islam in 694 AH, he continued his military campaigns against the Mamluk-controlled Levant, sacking Damascus in 699 AH. It was in this context that Ibn Taymiyyah's role as a scholar-activist reached its apex.

8.2 The Fatwa Against the Mongols

Ibn Taymiyyah issued a fatwa holding that it was obligatory (fard 'ayn) for the Muslims of the Levant to resist the Mongol invasion — even though the Mongol rulers nominally professed Islam. His argument rested on careful analysis: despite their nominal conversion, the Mongols governed by customary law (yasa) rather than the Shari'ah, fought against Muslims, and their campaign constituted aggression that made resistance a religious obligation. This fatwa, which contradicted those scholars who argued that fighting fellow Muslims was impermissible, was both legally sophisticated and politically explosive.

> *"Fighting these people is obligatory by the consensus of the Muslims. Whoever among them fights and is killed is a martyr, and whoever conquers is assisted by Allah."*
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> **— Ibn Taymiyyah, Fatwa on the Mongols, cited in Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah by Ibn Kathir**

8.3 The Battle of Shaqhab (702 AH / 1303 CE)

The Battle of Shaqhab, fought in Ramadan 702 AH near Damascus, was one of the decisive military encounters between the Mamluks and the Mongols. Ibn Taymiyyah played a remarkable personal role: he rode among the Muslim troops before the battle, exhorting them to fight, issuing a fatwa permitting the soldiers to break their Ramadan fast in order to have strength for combat (citing the prophetic precedent at the Battle of Badr), and guaranteeing them — on the authority of the Sunnah — that those who died would be martyrs. Ibn Kathir, who was present in Damascus at the time, gives a vivid account of how Ibn Taymiyyah's personal courage and religious authority rallied the soldiers.

The Muslim armies achieved a decisive victory at Shaqhab, and the Mongols were driven back. It was one of the most significant Mongol defeats in the region and

permanently curtailed their ability to threaten the Levant. Ibn Taymiyyah's contribution — both in providing the legal and theological framework for resistance and in personally sustaining the morale of the fighters — was widely acknowledged by contemporaries.

8.4 Negotiations and Moral Courage

Ibn Taymiyyah also personally visited Mongol commanders in the aftermath of earlier invasions, negotiating the release of Muslim prisoners — including non-Muslims taken captive — with a directness and fearlessness that became legendary. He reportedly told the Mongol commander Qutlushshah that he would not leave without securing the release of all prisoners, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, insisting that the dhimmi minorities under Islamic protection were his responsibility. Ibn Kathir records this episode with evident admiration, noting that Ibn Taymiyyah's moral stature gave him an authority that political rulers lacked.

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9. Trials, Imprisonments, and Controversies

The courage and independence that made Ibn Taymiyyah a towering moral figure also made him a persistent target of his opponents in the scholarly and political establishment. He was imprisoned on multiple occasions and faced formal judicial proceedings in both Cairo and Damascus.

9.1 First Major Trial — Cairo (705 AH)

In 705 AH (1305 CE), Ibn Taymiyyah was summoned to Cairo by the Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun to answer for his theological positions — specifically his teachings on the divine Attributes as articulated in the Wasitiyyah creed and the Hamawiyyah treatise. His opponents, drawn primarily from the Ash'ari establishment, accused him of anthropomorphism (tashbih) — comparing Allah to human beings — on account of his affirmation of the divine Attributes without allegorical interpretation.

The proceedings in Cairo were political as much as scholarly, with powerful court figures aligned against him. After several sessions of questioning before judicial panels, he was imprisoned in the Cairo Citadel (Qal'at al-Jabal) for approximately eighteen

months. His students and supporters maintained contact with him throughout, and he continued to write from prison.

Among the scholars who were aligned against him in this episode were Zayn al-Din Ibn Makhluf, the Maliki Chief Justice of Egypt, and various Ash'ari scholars of the Egyptian scholarly establishment. Among those who supported him or expressed sympathy were the Hanbali scholars of Syria and significant portions of the general scholarly community who respected his erudition even when they disagreed with his positions.

9.2 Second Period of Trial (707–709 AH)

Upon his release and return to Syria, Ibn Taymiyyah continued his scholarly activities and his public criticism of what he regarded as innovations — including the popular practice of making pilgrimages to the grave of Abraham (the Cave of Khalil near Hebron) which he held to be an unlawful innovation. These activities generated renewed complaints, and he was sent first to the city of Alexandria in Egypt, where he was imprisoned for approximately six months (709 AH), before being released and permitted to return to Cairo.

9.3 The Issue of Triple Divorce (720 AH)

In 720 AH, Ibn Taymiyyah's fatwa on the triple divorce — holding that three pronouncements of divorce in a single sitting constituted only one revocable divorce, not three irrevocable ones — brought him into direct confrontation with the established legal consensus of the four madhhabs, all of which held the triple pronouncement to be valid and irrevocable. The Mamluk judiciary, threatened by a position that would invalidate thousands of divorce judgments already issued, moved against him. He was imprisoned in Damascus in the Citadel for approximately five months.

9.4 Final Imprisonment (726–728 AH)

The final and longest imprisonment of Ibn Taymiyyah began in 726 AH when the Egyptian authorities issued an order prohibiting him from issuing fatwas on the question of visiting graves. He refused to observe this prohibition on the grounds that it amounted to suppressing legitimate scholarly opinion, and was arrested and confined in the Damascus Citadel (Qal'at Dimashq). He remained there until his death two years later.

During this final imprisonment, the authorities confiscated his writing materials in an attempt to prevent him from continuing to write. Ibn Kathir records that Ibn Taymiyyah

then used charcoal to continue writing on any available surface — a detail that has become emblematic of his unconquerable scholarly spirit.

9.5 Scholarly Disagreements About Him

It would be historically incomplete to present Ibn Taymiyyah without acknowledging the genuine and serious scholarly disagreements about him, not only from his opponents in Ash'ari or Shi'a circles, but from within the Sunni scholarly mainstream. His contemporary Taqi al-Din al-Subki (d. 756 AH), a leading Shafi'i scholar, authored several works critical of Ibn Taymiyyah, targeting in particular his positions on pilgrimage to the graves of the righteous, his triple divorce fatwa, and aspects of his theology. Kamal al-Din Ibn al-Zamlakani (d. 727 AH), initially a supporter, later distanced himself from some of Ibn Taymiyyah's positions. Ibn Battuta, the famous traveler, recorded in his Rihla (Travels) a critical account of Ibn Taymiyyah that reflects perspectives from scholars hostile to him.

These disagreements were genuine scholarly debates among highly qualified scholars, and they continue to be discussed by contemporary Islamic scholars. They do not diminish Ibn Taymiyyah's stature but situate him within an ongoing conversation about the proper methodology of Islamic thought — a conversation to which he contributed more than virtually any other individual in the post-classical period.

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10. His Students

Perhaps Ibn Taymiyyah's most enduring contribution was the generation of scholars he trained, who carried his approach to scholarship and his theological positions forward across the centuries.

10.1 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (691–751 AH)

Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah was Ibn Taymiyyah's most devoted student and the one who most comprehensively inherited and transmitted his teacher's thought. A towering scholar in his own right, Ibn al-Qayyim was imprisoned alongside his teacher in the Damascus Citadel during the final imprisonment — choosing loyalty to his teacher over freedom. His works — including Zad al-Ma'ad (Provisions of the Afterlife), I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in (Informing the Signatories), Madarij al-Salikin (The Stations of the Spiritual Wayfarers), and Al-Wabil

al-Sayyib — represent the fullest intellectual development of Ibn Taymiyyah's scholarly legacy. Ibn al-Qayyim combined his teacher's theological rigor with a depth of spiritual insight and literary beauty that gave the tradition a new voice. Through him, Ibn Taymiyyah's ideas reached generations of scholars who might otherwise not have encountered them.

10.2 Ibn Kathir (700–774 AH)

'Imad al-Din Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir al-Dimashqi is one of the most widely read Islamic scholars in history, primarily through his monumental Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim (Exegesis of the Magnificent Qur'an) and his historical chronicle Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah (The Beginning and the End). A Shafi'i scholar who was deeply influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah's methodology in hadith criticism and theology, Ibn Kathir provides some of the most reliable firsthand accounts of his teacher in Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah. His tafsir reflects Ibn Taymiyyah's method of explaining the Qur'an first by the Qur'an, then by the Sunnah, then by the sayings of the Companions — the method articulated in the Muqaddima fi Usul al-Tafsir. Through Ibn Kathir, Ibn Taymiyyah's hermeneutical approach became embedded in mainstream Sunni tafsir scholarship.

10.3 Al-Dhahabi (673–748 AH)

Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Dhahabi was one of the greatest hadith critics and biographical scholars in Islamic history. His works — Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', Mizan al-I'tidal, Tadhkirat al-Huffaz, and Tarikh al-Islam — are fundamental references for Islamic scholarship. Though a devoted student of Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Dhahabi maintained a degree of critical independence from his teacher, occasionally noting in his biographical notice on Ibn Taymiyyah that certain positions were excessive or better avoided. His balanced assessment — combining profound admiration with honest critique — is the most authoritative contemporary account of Ibn Taymiyyah's scholarly character.

10.4 Ibn 'Abd al-Hadi (704–744 AH)

Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Hadi al-Maqdisi al-Hanbali was another significant student and biographer of Ibn Taymiyyah. His Al-'Uqud al-Durriyyah fi Manaqib Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah is one of the most detailed primary biographical sources on Ibn Taymiyyah's life, recording anecdotes, scholarly achievements, and the testimony of contemporaries with the care of a trained hadith scholar. His defence of Ibn Taymiyyah

against the criticisms of al-Subki in Al-Sarim al-Munki is an important document in the ongoing scholarly debate about his teacher.

10.5 Ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari and Others

Other students and associates who transmitted aspects of Ibn Taymiyyah's scholarship include Ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari, the encyclopedist and geographer; Safi al-Din al-Hanbali; and numerous other scholars whose names appear in the biographical literature. The breadth of his scholarly circle reflects the extraordinary range of his influence during his lifetime.

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11. His Character and Worship

11.1 Devotion to Worship

Contemporary biographers consistently note that Ibn Taymiyyah's prodigious scholarly output existed alongside an equally impressive personal devotion to worship. His nights were spent in extended voluntary prayers, his days divided between teaching, research, and writing. Al-Dhahabi writes in Siyar A'lam al-Nubala' that Ibn Taymiyyah was constant in his dhikr (remembrance of Allah), that he wept often in prayer, and that his physical engagement with worship — his bowing, prostration, and supplication — was marked by a sincerity that his students found deeply moving.

> *"He was constant in the remembrance of Allah at all times. His prayer was long, his prostration extended. Often I would see him in the prayer as if he were a pillar."*
>
> **— Al-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', Vol. 18**

11.2 Humility and Generosity

Despite his towering scholarly reputation, contemporaries record that Ibn Taymiyyah was personally humble, approachable, and generous. He is reported to have never dined alone, always inviting students, visitors, and the poor to share his table. He spent his personal income freely on charitable purposes. Ibn Abd al-Hadi records that he was known for visiting the sick, attending funerals, and personally engaging with the poor and marginalized of Damascus — conduct that won him a devoted popular following that transcended the scholarly class.

He wore simple clothing, avoiding the elaborate dress sometimes adopted by prominent scholars, and was known to travel without retinue or ceremony. His personal simplicity stood in striking contrast to the grandeur of his intellectual achievement.

11.3 Courage in Speaking the Truth

Perhaps the quality most celebrated by his admirers — and most criticized by his opponents — was his willingness to state his scholarly positions without fear of political or social consequences. He confronted Mongol commanders in person, rebuked Mamluk sultans and their officials for conduct he considered unjust, issued fatawa that contradicted the entrenched legal consensus, and refused to retract positions even under imprisonment. Al-Dhahabi writes:

> *"He feared no one in the cause of Allah. He did not fear the sultans in speaking the truth, and he did not fear the scholars in refuting what he regarded as error. He stood firm in the face of tribulations with a firmness that astonished the wise."*
>
> **— Al-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', Vol. 18**

11.4 Patience During Imprisonment

His multiple imprisonments brought out what his students regarded as his most admirable personal qualities. Rather than expressing bitterness or despair, he described his imprisonment in terms that reflect remarkable spiritual equanimity. The famous statement attributed to him — and recorded by Ibn al-Qayyim — became one of the most celebrated expressions of Islamic spiritual fortitude:

> *"What can my enemies do to me? My paradise is in my heart; wherever I go it goes with me. My imprisonment is seclusion, my execution is martyrdom, and my exile is a journey."*
>
> **— Attributed to Ibn Taymiyyah, recorded by Ibn al-Qayyim**

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12. His Final Years and Death

12.1 The Final Imprisonment

In Sha'ban 726 AH (July 1326 CE), an order arrived in Damascus from Cairo instructing that Ibn Taymiyyah be confined to the Damascus Citadel and prevented from issuing fatawa. The immediate pretext was his persistent fatawa on visiting graves, which the Egyptian religious establishment found disruptive and which generated ongoing

controversy. He was taken to the Citadel and confined there, initially with access to books and writing materials.

As the imprisonment continued and his opponents feared the influence of his written output, his books, pens, and ink were confiscated — an act that was experienced by the scholarly community as a particularly cruel deprivation. Ibn Kathir records that Ibn Taymiyyah continued to write with coal on whatever surfaces were available. Despite the physical privations of his confinement and deteriorating health, he reportedly maintained his habitual schedule of prayers, dhikr, and Qur'an recitation.

12.2 Death in the Citadel

Ibn Taymiyyah died in the Damascus Citadel on the night of Sunday–Monday, the 20th of Dhul-Qa'dah, 728 AH, corresponding to September 26, 1328 CE. He was sixty-seven years of age according to the lunar calendar. Ibn Kathir, who was present in Damascus at the time and who subsequently attended the funeral, provides a vivid eyewitness account in Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah.

According to Ibn Kathir and Ibn Abd al-Hadi, at the time of his death Ibn Taymiyyah had returned to studying and reciting Qur'an and was found in his cell in a state of dhikr. Ibn al-Qayyim, devastated by the news, composed a moving account of the last days of his teacher, describing how Ibn Taymiyyah had appeared serene and spiritually elevated in the final period of his confinement.

12.3 The Massive Funeral

The funeral of Ibn Taymiyyah became one of the most remarkable public events in the history of Damascus. When the news of his death spread through the city, the response of the population was extraordinary. Ibn Kathir writes that the people streamed out of their homes and businesses, that the markets of Damascus were emptied, and that a crowd estimated — depending on the source — at between one hundred thousand and five hundred thousand people followed his funeral procession.

> "*On the day of his funeral, the markets of Damascus were closed. The people — men, women, and children — poured out in numbers the like of which had not been seen in Damascus for a great age. The crowd was beyond counting.*"
>
> **— Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, Vol. 14**

He was buried in the Sufi cemetery (Maqbarat al-Sufiyya) in Damascus alongside his brother Sharaf al-Din. The outpouring of public grief, coming from a man who had died in prison with his books confiscated, was widely interpreted by his contemporaries and

later biographers as a posthumous vindication of his integrity and a judgment by the Muslim masses that transcended the verdicts of his judges.

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13. Legacy and Influence

13.1 Immediate Impact on Islamic Theology

In the decades immediately following his death, Ibn Taymiyyah's legacy was carried forward most powerfully by his students — particularly Ibn al-Qayyim, who systematized and developed his teacher's theological and spiritual thought in a series of works that became classics of Sunni scholarship. Through Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathir, his approach to theological methodology, Qur'anic interpretation, and hadith-based jurisprudence became embedded in the Hanbali and broader Sunni scholarly tradition.

The controversy surrounding him, however, did not diminish quickly. Works were written both defending and attacking his positions throughout the 8th and 9th centuries AH, reflecting the genuine depth and seriousness of the theological debates he had initiated. Al-Subki's critiques, and the responses to them by Ibn Abd al-Hadi and others, constitute a rich body of classical scholarship on questions of theological methodology that continue to be studied.

13.2 Influence on Hanbali Jurisprudence

Within the Hanbali madhhab, Ibn Taymiyyah's influence was transformative. His insistence on returning to the primary texts — the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah — and his willingness to depart from established madhhab positions when the evidence warranted it, established a model of independent, text-grounded scholarship within the Hanbali tradition that subsequent generations sought to emulate. Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (d. 795 AH), himself a major Hanbali scholar, provides valuable biographical and scholarly assessment of Ibn Taymiyyah in Dhayl Tabaqat al-Hanabilah, reflecting the complex reception of his legacy within the madhhab.

13.3 The Wahhabi/Salafi Reform Movements

The most dramatic impact of Ibn Taymiyyah's legacy came in the 18th century CE with the emergence of the reform movement initiated by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792 CE) in the Arabian Peninsula. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab drew heavily — though

selectively — on Ibn Taymiyyah's theological positions, particularly his critiques of popular devotional practices involving the intercession of saints and pilgrimage to graves, his definition of monotheism (tawhid), and his insistence on the Salafi method in theology. The alliance between Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and the Saudi political authority produced a state-sponsored religious reform movement that would go on to transform religious practice across the Muslim world.

The appropriation of Ibn Taymiyyah's thought by this movement has been the source of significant controversy. Scholars sympathetic to Ibn Taymiyyah have argued that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's reading was selective and at times more restrictive than Ibn Taymiyyah's own nuanced positions; scholars critical of the Wahhabi movement have associated their critiques of it with criticisms of Ibn Taymiyyah's theology more broadly. The question of the relationship between Ibn Taymiyyah's thought and modern Salafi-Wahhabi movements remains actively debated.

13.4 Influence on Later Reform Scholars

Beyond the specifically Wahhabi trajectory, Ibn Taymiyyah's influence is visible across a much broader range of Islamic reform movements and scholars. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Rashid Rida — the founders of Islamic Modernism in the 19th and early 20th centuries — drew on Ibn Taymiyyah's critique of taqlid (blind following of legal precedent) and his defense of ijtihad to justify their own reform agendas, even though they drew very different political and theological conclusions. In the 20th century, figures as diverse as Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood, and contemporary traditional scholars in the Hanbali, Shafi'i, and Maliki traditions, have all engaged seriously with Ibn Taymiyyah's scholarship.

13.5 The Question of Influence on Militant Movements

An important and sensitive aspect of Ibn Taymiyyah's legacy concerns the invocation of his thought — particularly his fatawa regarding the Mongols and the obligation of jihad against rulers who do not govern by the Shari'ah — by militant Islamic movements in the 20th and 21st centuries. Groups including al-Qaeda and others have cited his Mongol fatwas as precedents for militant action against contemporary states. Most mainstream Islamic scholars, including the majority of Hanbali authorities, have argued strenuously that such applications represent a profound decontextualization and misuse of his opinions, ignoring the specific legal conditions he specified and the broader framework of his thought.

This controversy underscores the extraordinary reach of Ibn Taymiyyah's influence — and the corresponding responsibility that attaches to his legacy. Few pre-modern scholars have been more contested, more misread, and more urgently in need of careful, contextual, and scholarly understanding.

13.6 Scholarly Evaluation

Among scholars who have written serious academic studies of Ibn Taymiyyah in the modern era, there is broad agreement that he was a scholar of the highest order — a genuine polymath whose command of the Islamic sciences was essentially unmatched in his era. Henri Laoust's landmark French study of his political and social thought, Yahya Michot's careful philosophical analyses, Jon Hoover's study of his theodicy, and Sherman Jackson's examination of his relationship to Islamic legal theory all testify to the depth and originality of his thought from the perspective of modern academic scholarship.

From within the Islamic scholarly tradition, Al-Dhahabi's balanced assessment remains the most authoritative contemporary judgment: profound admiration for his erudition, courage, and piety, combined with honest acknowledgment that some of his positions were contested and that his uncompromising independence generated unnecessary conflicts. This balanced view — affirming his greatness while preserving scholarly humility — is perhaps the most appropriate orientation with which to approach the legacy of one of Islam's most extraordinary minds.

Conclusion: A Scholar for the Ages

Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah stands as one of the most remarkable individuals in the intellectual history of Islam. Born in a time of civilizational crisis — the aftermath of the Mongol devastation of the classical Caliphate — he responded not with despair but with a ferocious devotion to scholarship, an unconquerable personal courage, and a vision of Islamic revival rooted in the pristine sources of the Qur'an and the authenticated Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

His scholarly output, spanning virtually every field of the Islamic sciences, represents an intellectual achievement of the first order. His theological methodology — the recovery of the Salafi approach to the divine Names and Attributes, the comprehensive critique of philosophical kalam, the defense of revelation against the pretensions of

speculative reason — defined the trajectory of Sunni theological debate for centuries. His jurisprudential independence, his refusal to grant madhhab authority precedence over textual proof, and his model of engaged, principled scholarship made him the defining figure of Islamic reform methodology in the pre-modern period.

His life embodied a unity of scholarship and character that impressed even his opponents. He died as he had lived — in prison, stripped of his books, but unbroken in spirit, constant in worship, and surrounded by the love of students and the mourning of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Muslims who recognized in him something they rarely encountered: a scholar who feared none but Allah.

Ibn Kathir, his student and one of the most reliable witnesses to his life, concluded his biographical notice with these words:

> "*He was one of the greatest scholars and one of the most devout worshippers. He combined knowledge and action, the outer and the inner. He spoke the truth boldly and he was patient in bearing the harm that resulted from it. May Allah have mercy upon him and make his resting place spacious, for he was one of the foremost scholars of Islam.*"
>
> **— Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, Vol. 14**

The scholar who died in the Damascus Citadel in 728 AH did not die. His books are read across the world, his theological arguments debated in universities from Cairo to Chicago, his legal opinions studied in madrasas from Mauritania to Malaysia. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah — may Allah have mercy upon him and raise him among the foremost of the righteous — remains one of the most alive of the dead, a testament to the enduring power of scholarship animated by sincerity, courage, and an uncompromising devotion to truth.

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